



EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY

# My USDA

**A Progress Report for Employees on  
USDA's Cultural Transformation**

August 2011  
Volume I, Issue 8

## USDA's CULTURAL TRANSFORMATION ACTION ITEMS

- LEADERSHIP
- RECRUITMENT  
AND RETENTION
- TALENT  
MANAGEMENT
- EMPLOYEE  
DEVELOPMENT
- CUSTOMER FOCUS  
AND COMMUNITY  
OUTREACH

### Inside this issue:

USDA Assists Hmong Refugee Farmers	2
USDA at FAPAC	3
FNS' Random Acts of Fun	5
Illinois RD Employees Gather for CT Experience	6
USDA Diversity & Disability News	7
Teleworking Resources	8
Returning Peace Corp Volunteers and CT	9
AMS Cultural Transformation Training	10
USDA Feeds Families	11-12

## A Message from USDA Secretary Tom Vilsack

As I wrote you in an email earlier this month, the President signed into law a bipartisan bill that will reduce the deficit and avoid default. A victory for the American people, this legislation prevents a default that would have had a devastating effect on our economy.

This action allows USDA to continue operations and provide service and payments as scheduled. But our efforts to find efficiencies and strengthen USDA must continue. I want you to lead the Federal government in an effort to focus on our core competencies and do them better than anyone in the world. As we lead, I believe your extraordinary work to serve the American people through innovation, creativity and collaboration will help us build an even better USDA.

This does not lessen our commitment to Cultural Transformation and the continued improvement of USDA worklife. We know that the quality of our work environ-

ment helps determine how productive we are. Telework, the opportunity to work flexible hours, stronger partnerships with employee affinity groups, and other implemented action items are all conducive to productivity. Tightening our belts does not mean we can be distracted from implementing the Cultural Transformation Initiative. In fact, our continued implementation of the initiative is crucial to our success.

Thank you for your diligence and hard work on behalf of the American people throughout the lengthy budget negotiation process. I encourage you to continue working with that spirit, serving the American people to the fullest of your abilities now and in the coming new fiscal year.

If you have not already donated to "Feds Feed Families," please consider doing so before this



year's campaign ends on August 31st. All donations are voluntary. Go to ["Feds Feed Families" USDA Feeds Families website](#) to learn more.

You can contact the staff of My USDA via email at [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov).

And please be sure to visit the [USDA Cultural Transformation Website](#).

**Thomas J. Vilsack**

**Secretary**

### UPCOMING SPECIAL EMPHASIS PROGRAM OBSERVANCES

September is Hispanic Heritage Month. The USDA Observance is scheduled for Thursday, September 15, 2011, at Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC, at 10 am.

October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The USDA Observance is scheduled for Wednesday, October 5, 2011, at Jefferson Auditorium, Washington, DC, at 10 am.

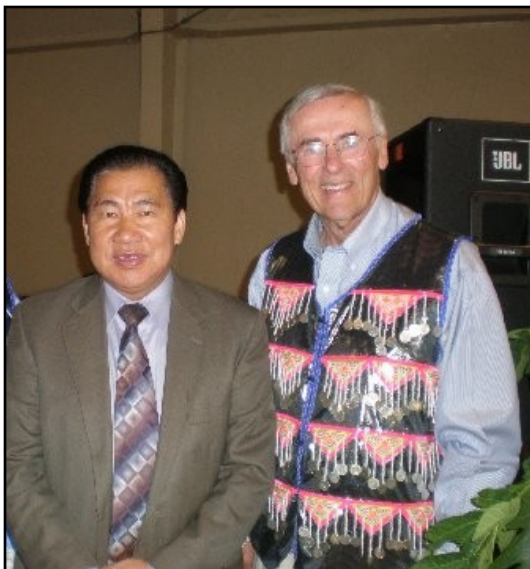
### IF YOU'RE IN DC, ADD THESE TO YOUR CALENDAR!

*If you're not a DC-area employee, watch for the email linking to the video so that you can view the celebration shortly after the event is recorded.*

## USDA HELPING HMONG/LAO FARMING COMMUNITY

USDA is helping Hmong and Lao refugee farmers develop new markets for their crops. The Farm Service Agency (FSA) was part of the Hmong Specialty Crop Conference held in Fresno, California on July 19-20. Nearly 150 participants toured local Hmong/Lao farms and attended workshops on developing markets, educating the American consumer about Asian specialty vegetables, and learning to respond to the challenges facing minority small family farmers. Former USDA Undersecretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services Gus Schumacher was keynote speaker. He and Richard H. Molinar, a farm adviser at the University of California Cooperative Extension were recognized in a Hmong ceremony during which they received Hmong names and had white strings tied to their wrists as part of a Hmong custom wishing them well.

The Hmong Specialty Crop Conference included a farm tour. USDA officials on the tour included, from left top, **Danny Hamon** (USDA APHIS Sacramento); top right is **Tou Thao** (USDA FSA Fresno); kneeling is **Val Dolcini** (USDA FSA State Executive Director, Davis, CA, holding a SinquaAsian squash); and (bottom) an unnamed tour participant.



**LEFT:** Former Undersecretary for Farm and Foreign Agricultural Services **Gus Schumacher** (right) with **Dr. Charlie Chang**, conference facilitator and Hmong official.

**RIGHT:** Former Undersecretary Schumacher with **Richard Molinar** (right) with the University of California Cooperative Extension and Miss Hmong International, **Mai Xai Vue**.



If you'd like to share feedback about the Cultural Transformation, telework, diversity, "Feds Feed Families," or any other aspect of worklife at USDA, send an email to: [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov) or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to USDA Connect.



## WHAT DO YOU THINK? MESSAGES FROM USDA EMPLOYEES

### I BELIEVE

by Vincent Yn

I believe that with steadfast ambition we all have an opportunity for greatness. Attending the Federal Asian Pacific American Council (FAPAC) leadership training helped to confirm my belief. I represented USDA Rural Development/DCFO-St. Louis at FAPAC's 26<sup>th</sup> Annual Leadership Conference in Seattle, Washington. The conference was designed to highlight benefits of diversity in today's workforce and offer valuable information about how to enhance one's leadership skills. While

attending this event I met personally with national and political leaders, including White House Staff, to learn about the minority workforce and inclusion. I also networked with other Federal employees from various professional backgrounds. FAPAC provides a good opportunity to interact with a vast assortment of leaders at all levels within our everyday work environment.

I believe the lives we LIVE are the lives we make. One of my most memorable experiences at the FAPAC Conference was when I shared the following personal story with a diverse group of professionals. I survived a life-threatening journey to the United States. My family and I fled Vietnam by boat and stayed at sea for many days without food and water – while dealing with a dangerous



**Vincent Yn** (second from left) with (from L-to-R) **Kimm Slayton** from the Office of Human Resources Management; **Janet Nuzum**, the Associate Administrator for Policy, FAS; **Monshi Ramdass**, the Director of OHRM's Recruitment, Diversity, Wellness and Worklife, Mediation, Disability, and Veterans Employment Division; and **Karlease Kelly**, the Provost of USDA's Virtual University.

group of pirates at the same time. We stayed at several refugee camps, with very poor conditions, for many months before settling into the United States. We lost everything we had and came to the U. S. with no money, no English background, or knowledge of the culture. In spite of all this, we were optimistic about life in general. We believed, with extreme conviction, that America was a place where *anyone* could flourish. No matter which side of the tracks we came from, our heritage or current social ranking, we *knew* we could rise above it all and accomplish anything. We held this conviction not only for ourselves, but for our children, and our children's children. We understood that a perfect childhood was not a requirement for leading a satisfying and productive life.

I believe we must work to become leaders and take charge as leaders. There are approximately 40 sponsors and partners who continually support FAPAC's Conference Training. The Department of Agriculture is a Diamond Sponsor, and Rural Development is a Bronze Sponsor. Notably, Secretary Thomas J. Vilsack received the 2011 FAPAC Civilian Award in Diversity Excellence. He was honored because one of his top priorities is the Cultural Transformation of USDA – by creating a diverse, inclusive, high performing organization.

After attending the FAPAC Conference I felt proud to be a Federal employee and more confident that we will attain the goals set forth by Secretary Vilsack. I hope all employees have the opportunity to participate in these kinds of conferences where they can meet other Federal professionals and share ideas on how to improve our workforce and provide even better service to the public.

I enjoyed reading the July 2011 issue of MyUSDA. I especially enjoyed the article on the NCRS' partnership with Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority. I am a member of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, an African-American organization, which was founded on the campus of Howard University in 1913. I would love to see this partnership with my sorority as well as the other two African-American sororities: Sigma Gamma Rho and Zeta Phi Beta Sorority. African American women need to be aware of federal resources, because many of them have not been told how to go about seeking federal employment and the incentives available. Maybe in the future, there can be STEP/SKEP program incentives, internships, and scholarships available to recruit African American women in these sororities.

Ms. Brianne Young  
USDA-Forest Service  
Cherokee, NC

**Share your pride in USDA with a message to fellow employees.**

**What do you think? Send an email to [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov) and let us know.**

## EMPLOYEE SPOTLIGHT The Spotlight's on YOU!

### National, State, & Federal Partnership Leads to "Dream Come True" for Job Corp Student with a Disability

Submitted by Clara Johnson

A little bit of fate, a lot of hard work, and a strong collaborative partnership were the catalyst for positive change in the life of new Forest Service employee Tawan Weeden. As a student enrolled at the Blackwell Job Corps Center in Wisconsin, Tawan connected with several key contacts that help employ individuals with disabilities in the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

In 2008, while pursuing a vocational trade in business as a Job Corps enrollee, Tawan's Business Administration instructor referred him for an interview as a Mail and File Clerk at the Forest Service's Eastern Regional Office in Milwaukee. He was hired to oversee the mailroom as a temporary employee through the Student Temporary Employment Program (STEP). While working in the position, Tawan earned credit through work-based learning as required for all Job Corps students.

Tawan worked steadily and purposefully, learning the routine and forming relationships with fellow employees. He quickly grasped the essence of his duties, guaranteeing that mail was collected and distributed on time. In addition, his easy going personality and quick smile, won the hearts of many in a short period of time.

Although performing well, Tawan's supervisor noticed that some of his tasks were challenging, and created a barrier to his advancement. He discussed the challenges with his Supervisor, and they agreed to seek some resources for additional support.

Soon after this discussion, the Eastern Regional Office, Civil Rights Department hosted a Disability Employment Awareness Month event. The guest speakers presented information about a range of services available to help individuals with disabilities obtain and maintain employment. Tawan and his supervisor sought assistance from a Forest Service EEO Specialist and the regional Job Corps Liaison to assess Tawan's needs.

The assessment results substantiated Tawan's eligibility for Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR) support services and his eligibility for permanent hire at the Forest Service using the Schedule A Hiring Authority. Schedule A allows managers to non-competitively hire qualified individuals with disabilities who are ready to work. After two years of successful performance, employees hired under Schedule A may be converted to competitive service. Tawan's experience demonstrates that individuals with disabilities can obtain gainful employment and enjoy opportunities to advance within Federal service. This is an excellent model of how Federal leaders and hiring managers can create a successful employment environment for individuals with disabilities.

## TAWAN WEEDEN



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*If you haven't read previous issues of MyUSDA, here's your chance!*

[MyUSDA Issue 1](#)   [MyUSDA Issue 2](#)   [MyUSDA Issue 3](#)

[MyUSDA Special Issue—Summary Progress](#)

[MyUSDA Issue 4](#)   [MyUSDA Issue 5](#)   [MyUSDA Issue 6](#)

[MyUSDA Issue 7](#)

## Random Acts of Fun in the FNS Mountain Plains Regional Office

Cultural Transformation is about more than making the workplace work better; it's also about building camaraderie and having a little fun with your colleagues. In the USDA Food & Nutrition Service (FNS) Mountain Plains Regional Office (MPRO), the fun part often gets a boost through Random Acts of Fun.

For the past four years, the MPRO Communications Team has organized creative, active, and educational events that take less than 15 minutes to accomplish but bring hours of smiles. All of the events are announced on short notice and are designed to give everyone a quick break. Many focus on team building or light physical activity and always have a fun element.

The most recent event, the Recycling Relay, involved three teams of MPRO staffers lining up to quickly sort a box of recyclable materials into three different bins. The MPRO Green Team taught everyone how to identify recycling symbols on glass and plastic products and how some materials have recyclable and non-recyclable parts. The teams then raced to quickly and correctly sort the trash from the recyclables and move them across a conference room to the correct bin. An added challenge: paper products had to be tossed into the proper bin from a free-throw line.

"These are a breath of fresh air that brings everyone together for a mix of entertainment, education, and even exercise," said Jan Armstrong, a Program Specialist in MPRO's Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and a regular participant in the Random Acts of Fun.

Another recent event had a message of safety combined with an obstacle course. Teams of two, a "passenger" in an office chair wearing a hard hat and a "driver" pushing the chair wearing a safety vest, had to maneuver around a short course. The event provided a quick burst of exercise and reminded everyone to keep safety in mind during a long construction project in the MPRO building.

Other Random Acts of Fun have included the Wii Winter video games, showing short comedy videos connected to the workplace, cup stacking and paddle ball competitions, and the MPRO Annual Rubber Duck Race.



**Racing to Recycle:** MPRO Staffers join in Random Acts of Fun like this Recycling Relay pitting teams against each other to quickly sort recyclable items.



**Brad Nettles**, MPRO Financial Management Specialist and a Peer Awards Store Administrator, displays the array of prizes available to employees with their Peer Awards points.

## Peer Awards Store Takes "Thanks" to New Level

Saying "Thank You" has reached a new and creative level at the FNS' MPRO. Employees have the opportunity to thank their colleagues for help or a job well done and, at the same time, offer them points toward earning prizes of their choice.

Developed by the MPR Reward, Recognize, and Retain (RRR) team, the Peer Awards Store has been a popular addition to the region's Cultural Transformation efforts. The idea behind the program is to allow employees to recognize and reward coworkers via a non-monetary system.

At the start of the fiscal year, MPR staff members are given 80 Peer Awards points and managers receive 120 points, which they can award in 10-point increments to other employees. Employees who receive Peer Awards points can spend their reward at the Peer Awards Store. Points can be awarded for specific outstanding accomplishment such as a superior contribution on a short-term assignment or project, employee contributions and achievements that enhance organizational performance, support organizational goals, and improve organizational quality or to simply recognize a great attitude.

Each award notice is sent via email through the MPR Peer Awards Store website, which also allows senders to personalize a short thank you note to the recipient. "We have other opportunities to recognize each other through the year, but the Peer Awards Store is special because anyone can give and receive them at any time and save up the points for a nice selection of prizes," said Michelle Montoya, MPRO Financial Management Accountant and an administrator for the Peer Awards Store.

Some examples of the items that employees can use points to earn include coffee mugs, water bottles, shirts, umbrellas, and even a small pair of binoculars. All of the items have an FNS-MPRO logo to make them unique to the region. Employees have until September to award their points and to spend points they were awarded during the fiscal year.



## ILLINOIS RURAL DEVELOPMENT EMPLOYEES HOLD AREA MEETING AT JAPAN HOUSE

Spurred by the agency's Cultural Transformation efforts, USDA Rural Development staff from three east central Illinois offices held their area meeting at Japan House in Champaign, Illinois.

They participated in the custom of a traditional tea ceremony, a 400-year old Japanese art form, known as *Chado*, the Way of Tea. It signifies the highest Japanese ideals of harmony, respect, purity, and tranquility. The Way of Tea involves serving and receiving a bowl of tea with the utmost sincerity, while exhibiting an intense awareness of the concept, "one life, one opportunity."

Additionally, their cross cultural experience was extended as they were treated to a performance of *Bharata Natyam*, a classical dance form originating in South India and accompanied by the classical Carnatic music. Summer intern Arielle Smith described it as a "culturally enriching and peaceful experience."

*Photos by Lisa Bowden*



## USDA EMPLOYEES HOLD BLOOD DRIVES FOR US ARMED FORCES

USDA employees are helping members of the U.S. Armed Forces who are fighting in Afghanistan and Iraq. USDA is hosting additional blood drives for the Armed Services Blood Program (ASBP) after two successful previous blood drives.

ASBP ensures that blood and blood platelets are available to on-duty members of the armed forces who need it. They also supply to dependents of U.S. servicemen and women. ASBP provides blood and platelets to all branches of the U.S. Armed Forces, collecting between 50-100 units per week. At least two patients are helped as a result of each unit collected.

If you're in the Washington, DC, area, please mark your calendars so you can participate in an upcoming USDA blood drive for ASBP.

**October 5<sup>th</sup> – 8:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the Whitten Patio, Washington, D.C.**

**November 9<sup>th</sup> – 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. in the USDA George Washington Carver Center in Beltsville, MD.**

For an inspiring and informative video on the work accomplished by the ASBP, watch <http://www.youtube.com/militaryblood#p/u/6/YnSPN3L3SUo>





### MyUSDA Column

## Diversity & Disabilities

By Alison Levy  
USDA Disability Employment Program Manager

*A cornerstone of our USDA Cultural Transformation effort is to increase employment of individuals with disabilities. This column includes information, resources, and success stories from throughout USDA that are being shared to support this initiative.*

USDA Student interns with disabilities are a terrific pipeline of talent into permanent employment. This month, USDA is shining the spotlight on converting terrific student interns into permanent employees.

**Agricultural Marketing Service and the American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD):** [www.aapd.com](http://www.aapd.com)

Maya Ariel, an undergraduate student studying Business Administration at Rochester Institute of Technology, joined the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) as an intern for the agency's Fruit and Vegetable Programs. Maya, who is Deaf, assists Christopher Purdy, Business Development Specialist, identify ways for AMS to partner with other organizations and market the program's services.



Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) intern **Maya Ariel**

"We support AAPD's belief that what really matters at work is what people can do. Regardless of ability or disability, we can all learn from each other," Purdy said. "AMS values its partnerships with diverse organizations, such as AAPD, that enable us to identify, attract, and recruit top tier talent. We encourage students to become familiar with the agency and learn about other career opportunities."

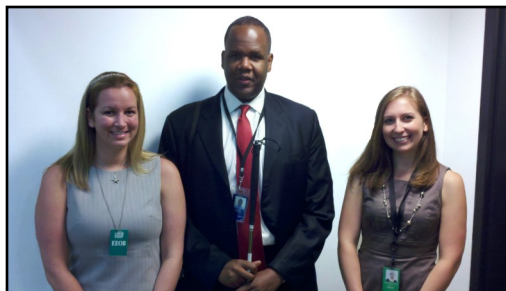
Maya has acting experience ranging from key roles in plays to a more recent role on the TV series, "What Would You Do?" where she portrayed a Deaf applicant trying to obtain a job in a coffee shop. Hidden cameras captured customer reactions during Maya's experience as a Deaf applicant. View the story on YouTube:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uq11d4rLWSM>.

AAPD recently visited USDA to produce a video chronicling a day in Maya's shoes. You can see that at the AAPD internship program web site at [www.aapd.com](http://www.aapd.com) in the early Fall.

**Departmental Management and the Workforce Recruitment Program (WRP):** [www.wrp.gov](http://www.wrp.gov)

Lauren Kotwicki is a graduate student carrying a double course load to complete her degree this month in Public Relations and Corporate Communications at Georgetown University. She is interning with the Diversity Recruitment Division in the Office of Human Resources Management part-time in the office and part time through telework.



USDA Disability Employment Program Student Intern **Lauren Kotwicki** (left) participated in a recent disability policy meeting at the White House. She is pictured with **Kareem Dale**, Special Assistant to the President for Disability Policy (middle) and **Sara Feuerstein**, Special Assistant to Mr. Dale (right). Sara is also a former USDA Intern.

Lauren assists in managing the Department's email account for the Disability Employment Program, and consolidates resumes into a centralized spreadsheet of job applicants with disabilities seeking student internships and permanent employment. Lauren is also assisting the editor of the "My USDA" newsletter with the next issue.

USDA has provided Lauren with some great exposure to public service, including participating in a program for Federal student interns with disabilities at the White House in July, where she met Special Assistant to the President for Disability Policy, Kareem Dale.

"This is my first experience in Federal service. I am enjoying learning about the Disability Employment Program and how to use Schedule A to hire and be hired into Federal service. I'm now considering a public service career and I'm actively looking for a permanent placement."

### How to Hire Permanent Employees with Disabilities

The Schedule A Hiring Authority is a fast and efficient way for managers to hire applicants with a psychiatric, intellectual, or severe physical disability into permanent employment, without competition.

#### Schedule A: What You Need to Know

Non-competitive hiring process:

- ◆ Identify a qualified applicant with a disability and the individual may be hired immediately.
- ◆ No public notice/advertising is required
- ◆ Schedule A can be used to promote current employees with disabilities
- ◆ The USDA TARGET Center helps with reasonable accommodations: <http://www.dm.usda.gov/oo/target/>
- ◆ Established national and local networks can refer qualified candidates to fill vacancies quickly and efficiently.

**For more information, contact your USDA agency Disability Employment Program Manager.**



## TELEWORK AT USDA

By Work/Life & Wellness Manager **Mika Cross** and Work/Life and Wellness Student Intern **Oeshae Morgan**

Did you miss USDA featured on the "Making the Grade" webcast about Telework? If so, please be sure to check out the archived recording located at:

<http://www.teleworkexchange.com/events/webcast/events-detail/956>

**MAKING THE TELEWORK  
GRADE WEBCAST:**  
Meeting the Telework Enhancement Act Requirements



USDA and the Federal CIO Council are hosting a joint conference titled the **Federal Mobile Computing Summit** on August 23-24 at the Ronald Reagan Building and International Trade Center. The Summit seeks to provide a forum for sharing ideas, best practices, lessons learned, as well as new technology, software and services that will help enable a mobile government workforce. Topic areas include:

- Native and web-based mobile applications (development and management tools)
- Mobile computing devices (management)
- GIS and GPS in a mobile world
- Use cases for mobilizing a workforce and/or mobilizing customers
- Mobile network management and services
- Delivering mobility: infrastructure, people, processes

To register and for more information, please visit the Summit website at: <http://www.ocio.usda.gov/mobileconf/>

And be sure to join USDA at the October 18<sup>th</sup> **Telework Town Hall Meeting** at the Ronald Regan Building in Washington, D.C. for the "Powering Telework Progress" session spotlight, featuring Mika Cross, Work/Life and Wellness Program Manager. For more information and to register, you can visit: [www.teleworkexchange.com](http://www.teleworkexchange.com)

## TELEWORKERS FINDING CEPO TO BE AN IMPORTANT RESOURCE

The Centralized Excess Property Operation (CEPO) in Beltsville, Maryland provides efficient on-demand cost competitive property disposal services throughout the Washington, DC, Metropolitan Area for USDA and 13 other Federal agencies. Before acquiring new furniture or property, it is required that CEPO first be surveyed for suitable property.



CEPO offers unneeded personal property, such as furniture, used computers, electronic equipment, and various motor vehicles for use elsewhere within USDA. If there is no need for the property by any activity within USDA, the agency declares the property excess, and the General Services Administration can declare it surplus property. Then it is available for donation to State and Local Government agencies and other eligible non-Federal activities. CEPO is an active participant in the Computers for Learning program that permits the donation of excess computer equipment to school children.

CEPO manages an inventory of furniture that has been rehabilitated, offering USDA agencies a savings of at least 40 percent over the cost of new furniture purchases. "I encourage customers to contact CEPO and let us know what your needs are. Every day, customers visit and select furniture items from our inventory and every day, we receive more items. One successful reuse project is the flat screen monitor program. So far this year almost 900 flat screen monitors have been reused by USDA agencies. That's a savings of over \$100,000 that the agencies can use elsewhere," says Carlos Casaus, Acting Director of the Beltsville Service Center.

CEPO also offers great resources for those who telework. Telework employees can visit CEPO and select furniture for their alternate worksite locations or home offices at no cost. However, the employee is responsible for delivery of property to their telework location. Take advantage of these free resources provided by CEPO to ensure success and productivity. Please contact CEPO prior to making the new purchases; they may have what you're looking for! For more information, visit [www.bsc.usda.gov](http://www.bsc.usda.gov) or call the Beltsville Service Center at (301) 394-0400.





## FNS Hosts Cultural Transformation Event for Returned Peace Corps Volunteers

Returned Peace Corps Volunteers (RPCVs) who work at USDA's Food and Nutrition Service hosted an event on June 16 to celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of Peace Corps and to celebrate cultural differences. It took place at FNS headquarters in Alexandria, VA.

FNS RPCVs who participated in the event included the following: Gene Austin, Sierra Leone, 1983 – 1987; Rosa Bartholomew, Kyrgyzstan, 2003 – 2004; Bob Delorenzo, Guatemala, 1988 – 1990; Mary Beth Flowers, Jamaica, 1981 – 1983; Stan Garnett, Philippines, 1962 – 1964; Lisa Greenwood, Dominican Republic, 1984 – 1986; Keith Jabati, Sierra Leone, 1986 – 1988; Moira Johnston, Central African Republic, 1985 – 1987; Marta Kealey, Guatemala, 1986 – 1989; Erin McBride, Kenya, 1981 – 1983; Jimmy Nguyen, Peru, 2005 – 2007; Gus Okonkwo, Thailand, 1986 – 1988; Susan Ponemon, Burkina Faso, 1977 – 1980; Shanta Swezy, Kazakhstan, 1993 – 1996; Patricia von Reyn, Swaziland, 1977 – 1979; Linda Washington, Southern Carolinian Islands – Ponape, 1977 – 1980; and Mary Jane

Whitney, Niger, 1975 – 1978.

Since 1961, over 200,000 Americans have served in the Peace Corps, working in 139 countries and making a difference every day. Past and current FNS employees are very proud to be a part of this heritage. The inspiration for the FNS 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Peace Corps celebration was based on one of the main goals stated in the mission of the

Peace Corps: *Helping promote a better understanding of other peoples on the part of Americans.*

This goal is one that most RPCVs continue for the rest of their lives, and it was part of the FNS Peace Corps celebration. Keith Jabati shared a video from a trip he took when he visited his Peace Corps country, Sierra Leone, 20 years after his service. It illustrated the power and importance of Peace Corps by showing that many of the projects Keith worked on and relationships he established during his service in the 1980s are still intact today. Other FNS RPCVs set up display tables which included mementos, artwork, and cultural food from their Peace Corps experiences.



### MyUSDA Publication Schedule (for the remaining fiscal year)

September *MyUSDA* will be published on Tuesday, September 13, 2011.

The deadline for September admissions is Thursday September 8, 2011

### Guidance on Submissions to MyUSDA

Submissions to *MyUSDA* should indicate progress that you, your agency, or your mission area has achieved toward implementing the Secretary's Cultural Transformation (CT) Initiative. Submissions may be in the form of a traditional article with a byline (with accompanying photos strongly preferred), a first-person account (describing a personal work-related experience relating to CT progress), or a "brief" (just a few sentences describing a successful Cultural Transformation event, group, initiative or activity...or some other relevant worklife issue)

The ideal submission is a great picture with about 75-150 words to go along with it.

Email submissions or further inquiries to [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov).

## AMS Holds Cultural Transformation Training

By: Sue Bernstein

In support of the Secretary's Cultural Transformation initiative, the Agricultural Marketing Service (AMS) is continually looking for ways to bring all employees, both at field and headquarters locations, into the fold and embrace the effort. Last month, Dr. Samuel Betances, or "Dr. B" as he prefers to be called, took us one step closer.



**Dr. Samuel Betances**  
(*"Dr. B"*)

In June, over 125 AMS supervisors and managers joined Dr. B in the Jefferson Auditorium to explore Cultural Transformation, and learn about ways to challenge ourselves to personally 'transform' AMS and USDA. The group participated in three-hours of storytelling, learning about the life and challenges Dr. B faced growing up in Harlem. Dr. B, a child of a multi-racial family, was looking at a life of crime and poverty as he dropped out of school until someone took an interest in him and challenged him to succeed, encouraged him to build confidence in himself, and change his future. He brought home to us the value of having (or becoming) a

mentor. When he found himself at Harvard as a part of an 'experiment', he met a professor who became his mentor and provided the support and encouragement he needed to ultimately graduate with a Ph.D. Dr. B challenged us to look for ways that we

can change our organization, and make it a model organization for our employees and our customers.

The AMS Cultural Transformation Committee, made up of both headquarters and field employees and operating under the guidance of AMS Associate Administrator Ellen King, continues to look for creative ways to move the organization forward on the Cultural Transformation journey. In addition to the training in the Jefferson Auditorium, Dr. B will be at our Cotton and Tobacco headquarters in Memphis, Tennessee in August meeting with employees that were unable to travel to Washington, D.C.

AMS, along with its sister agencies, APHIS and GIPSA, created a webcast, featuring Secretary Vilsack and his Cultural Transformation message, Dr. Sharon Freis-Britt from the University of Maryland, and each Agency administrator, explaining Cultural Transformation and what it can mean to each and every one of us.

***Cultural Transformation – AMS is on its way!***



## When a Successful Career Move Requires Sacrifice

### *Editor's Follow-Up*



In the July issue of *MyUSDA*, our Employee Spotlight was on Lenise Lago, the new Deputy Chief for Business Operations at the Forest Service. That article omitted an important fact about Lenise's career that demonstrates why she is such a good model for anyone who is serious about career advancement.

Lenise was originally the Budget Director for the Forest Service in Washington, working as a Senior Executive Service (SES) employee. However, she took a downgrade to go to the field where she could gain valuable experience serving as the Deputy Regional Forester in the Pacific Northwest.

**Lenise Lago** is the new Deputy Chief for Business Operations at the USDA's Forest Service.

Now that she has gained that experience at a regional level, she has returned to Washington to serve the entire Agency in a similar role. In her new position, Lenise is once again a SES employee, and she is also an example of the success that comes from having a strategic career advancement plan.

Are you interested in learning more about USDA's Telework Program and other top Work/Life and Wellness initiatives? Be sure to subscribe to our Work/Life and Wellness listserv to stay in the know! Send an email to [telework@dm.usda.gov](mailto:telework@dm.usda.gov) or connect with our [Work/Life and Wellness](#) if you have a USDA Connect account!



## USDA FEEDS FAMILIES

**DONATE TODAY! FEDS FEED FAMILIES ENDS AUGUST 31, 2011**

"Feds Feed Families" is the campaign by federal workers to help feed hungry families and children. Assistant Secretary for Administration Pearlie S. Reed has said USDA's goal is to meet these needs by donating 500,000 pounds of food, including 100,000 pounds of fresh produce from the People's Garden. Your voluntary donations go directly to families and children in need in your community.

USDA donated generously in June and July, but the August totals are even higher. So far this month we have donated 290,817 pounds of food. This brings USDA's total donations during this year's campaign to 393,918 pounds. If we continue to give at this pace, we can blow past our half-million pound goal!

- ◆ For a list of the most wanted items, go here: <http://www.fedsfeedfamilies.gov/mostwantedlist.pdf>
- ◆ You can track our progress here: <http://www.fedsfeedfamilies.gov/>.

### BARC Student Discovery Garden Helping Feds Feed Families

**"Our efforts will help Americans across the country who turn to food banks and food pantries for emergency food assistance over the summer. Food banks have reported record numbers of families, children, individuals, and first-time visitors seeking food assistance."**

**"This food drive comes at a critical time when donations are tapering off, and will greatly help nourish those struggling in hunger."**

**"Let us show the American people that USDA cares, and that we feed Americans in need."**

**—William P. Milton, Jr.  
Chief Human Capital  
Officer, USDA**

Diversity-promoting efforts at Beltsville Agricultural Research Center (BARC) are growing – not just figuratively, but literally. The Student Discovery Garden created by the Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce has the goal of providing an opportunity for young people in urban areas to experience some of the agricultural research being done at BARC in the hope that they will aspire to be the scientists of the future. Each of the garden's seven sections exhibits a different aspect of BARC research, from urban gardens to biofuels. Now in its second season, the Student Discovery Garden has already hosted around 400 student visitors, mostly from middle school to college level. Taskforce members interact with students and provide hands-on learning experiences.

As a registered People's Garden, the Student Discovery Garden is donating produce to this year's Feds Feed Families effort. "So far this year we have contributed 284 pounds of produce, which already tops the amount we provided to DC Central Kitchen through the People's Garden program last year," said Taskforce chair Verneta Gaskins.

Earlier this year, the Taskforce hosted a Beltsville Area Graduate Student Agricultural Research Symposium to help expand underrepresented minority participation in science and technology by offering 28 students from several 1890 land grant universities the opportunity to network with BARC scientists. In 2009, the Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce was awarded the Administrator's Outreach, Diversity, and Equal Opportunity Award for delivering a set of recommendations on best hiring practices to Area Director Joseph Spence. Additionally, the Taskforce sponsors numerous special emphasis events throughout the year and keeps BA staff informed about Taskforce activities through its communication tool.



Beltsville Area Diversity Taskforce member **Talo Pastor-Corrales** talks to students **Cindy Holland, Randi Williams, and Olivia Dickenson** about native plants such as corn in the Student Discovery Garden.

*(Photo credit: Jim Plaskowitz)*

See page 12 for more on  
Feds Feed Families

## USDA FEEDS FAMILIES

Agencies, Mission Areas, and Offices Cooperate to Gather Food Donations for the Hungry

What an exciting program "Feds Feed Families" has become and what an opportunity for agencies, employees, and communities to come together and support the need to provide food for the hungry.

Here at USDA:APHIS:VS in Fort Collins, Colorado, there is a patio garden with vegetable pots decorating the perimeter where employees volunteer time and energy to plant, water, grow, and harvest fresh vegetables for distribution to the food bank.

We ARE making a difference, one plant at a time ☺

Carol LoSapio, APHIS, Colorado



### FNS Employees Donate Thousands of Pounds of Food

FNS employee **Marcia Yost** with food items that she and several FNS colleagues donated to the cause. The Agency has donated more than 4,000 pounds of food so far!



USDA's Food and Nutrition Service has collected in excess of 4,000 pounds of food so far. The undertaking reinforces the Agency's commitment to "Community Outreach," a key pillar of Cultural Transformation.

"FNS employees, who work every day to fight hunger, have embraced this effort wholeheartedly," said FNS Administrator Audrey Rowe. "There is even friendly competition between offices at the Agency in terms of who has collected the most food."

### OHRM Steps Up to the Plate!

The employees of USDA's Office of Human Resources Management (OHRM) have donated approximately 3,500 pounds so far, and they are not done yet.

OHRM, which has about 80 employees, answered a personal challenge issued by **Chief Human Capital Officer William P. Milton, Jr.**, who started by donating 300 pounds of food.

OHRM's Recruitment, Diversity, Wellness & Work-life, Mediation, Disability, and Veterans Employment Division has donated 2,000 pounds of food. Division Director **Monshi**

**Ramdass** (right) and USDA Veterans Employment Manager **David Dissinger** (left) display the Division's donations.





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If you'd like to share your feedback about Feds Feed Families, Cultural Transformation, telework, diversity, or any other aspect of worklife at USDA, send an email to: [MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov](mailto:MyUSDA@dm.usda.gov) or visit USDA's [Work/Life and Wellness](#) community website if you have access to USDA Connect.



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